

Philosophy and Principles of Preservation in Practice

A country with no regard for its past will do little worth remembering in the future.

Abraham Lincoln

Our cultural properties bring us messages from our past. They are the lanterns of our past civilization. The message we get from a 17th-century fortification is different from the message we get from a plantation or a Victorian structure. The hall where the Declaration of Independence was signed, for example, brings us the message of the birth of our nation, supported by the philosophy of the Age of Enlightenment.

A historic structure is a thing of beauty and a document of history. A fundamental precondition for restoration is the recognition and definition of an object as a work of art, considering its aesthetic and historic aspects. Restoration and preservation are the methods for transmitting the work to the future.

This paper addresses the preservation and restoration process of any cultural property. It responds to three questions: What is to be considered as a “whole” of the object? What is the “context” of the object? What has been the “value” of the object?

The Whole

The “whole” is the unity of our structure resulting from the coalescing of various elements that combine to make a monument, historic structure, historic center of a town, or a plantation, and cannot be divided from each other. These elements can be as diverse as arts and crafts, a doorknob, a fortification, or a store.

The “whole” in historic preservation designates the entity of an object, structure, or complex. An old object by itself can be made of several elements that, put together, make that object.

The “whole” of an object could be as small as an antique ring, a painting, or sculpture, or as large as a plantation, a historic center, or a town. The number of elements in a ring is less than the

number of elements in the larger scale objects, such as a plantation or a town. The integrity, value, and character of the object, whether large or small, is related to its authenticity.

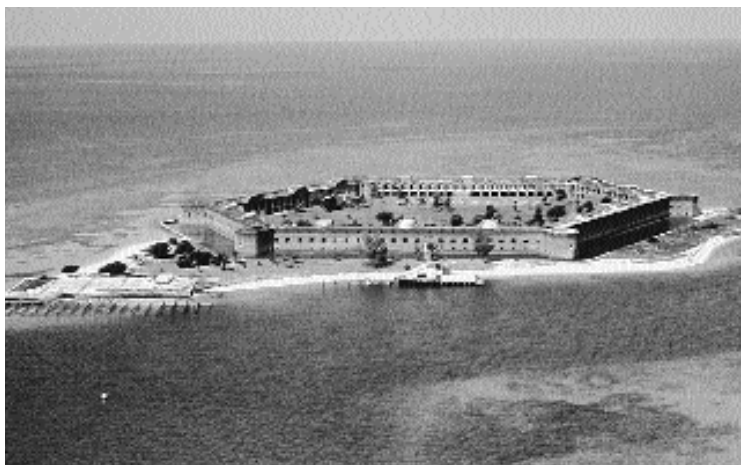
This authenticity is represented in the originality and character of each element in the “whole,” and the technique applied to put those elements together. An old doorknob or the fireplace mantel in a building has as much significance as the “whole” of which they are a part.

A good example of this concept is the plantation or historic center. In a plantation, everything from the large glorious mansion to the smallest privy, smokehouse, or blacksmith shop has the same value when it stands as part of the “whole.” When each of these structures is considered alone and is not looked upon as a “whole,” its individual value differs. But, as a whole entity, they complete and reinforce the value, significance, and function of the plantation as a historic site.

The analogy of a hand is instructive here. The function of a hand would be greatly impacted by the loss of one of the fingers, whether it was the tiny fifth finger, or the powerful thumb. The function of the hand would not be complete.

When a larger scale object is to be treated consistently as a whole, there must be close cooperation among the various specialists involved. The historical architect, historical landscape architect, architectural historian, archeologists, ethnographer, historical structural engineer, conservator, artisan, craftsmen, and many other disciplines should work hand-in-hand to treat the object. As the entire complex or “whole” will have to be treated under principles of preservation, the separate elements also will have to be treated as such within the preservation and restoration regulations.

There are situations where a historic site is a combination of an archeological site, historic structures, and historic landscape site. When this occurs, the parts of the whole represent different



Fort Jefferson is located on Golden Key in Key West Florida. This unfinished fort was constructed in 1846 due to its strategic location in the Florida Straits. Photo courtesy Everglades National Park/ Dry Tortugas.

cultural values. Let us consider, for example, a historic plantation with a combination of intact structures and ruins. The ruins can be consolidated or preserved as an archeological site in conjunction with other intact structures. This methodology adds more value to the “whole” complex. Without the presentation of the ruins, the pattern of the plantation would not be complete.

Historic structures, like human beings, have different shapes, characters, and values. Just as each person has a unique personality, each historic structure has a unique story to tell; hence, the restoration or preservation of a historic plantation, landscape site, fortification, or a small historic lighthouse, should be done with caution and sensitivity.

The principles to follow for restoration and preservation of an internationally or nationally significant structure or monument, which is rare and one-of-a-kind, are more detailed than those for a simple, locally significant structure that is more common. An internationally or nationally significant structure may carry more messages from our past and should be treated with a greater sense of responsibility.

Context

The context is the immediate surrounding of an object. It can be the frame of a painting, a meadow in front of a historic church, the canals of Venice, or the frame of a door or window. The “context” has relation to the scale, significance, and value of the “whole.”

In some cases, the context becomes an object in and of itself; for example, non-historic structures in a historic center, or a site where no individual building is a work of art, but taken as a whole, the collection of buildings become a monument in a historic center. Context and

object are dependent. One is not complete without the other. Context without an object is not complete, and the object devoid of its context suffers a diminished value, because the significance of its interpretation is lessened. The absence of context greatly changes the interpretation of the object. A historic church built originally in a small town or pastoral setting that is now being towered over by modern skyscrapers has a very different interpretive impact than that of its original context.

The recognition of the value of the whole and its context leads logically to the principle that every object should be preserved in total if one wants to save the full value and significance of the whole and its parts. The principles of preservation apply to all objects that are significant and have value in their natural and cultural surroundings. San Francisco, Venice, and Amsterdam, without their context of canals or hilly streets would not be the same. The canals or hilly streets are part of what gives these cities their character, beauty, and fame. A plantation’s context is its main building, gardens, trees, walkways, orchards, outbuildings, and the planting fields. The context is the connection that gives life and function to the whole. The same principle applies to an object and context as small as a historic door or window with its ornamental frame, or the jewel of the ring in its setting.

The landscape surrounding Castillo de San Marcos in St. Augustine, Florida, consists of the moat, a grassy open area, the seawalls, and river, which make that fortification stand out like a jewel in a crown. Besides the aesthetic value, the context adds to the authenticity and its value as a genuine monument. Other examples are Fort Jefferson in the Dry Tortugas, Florida, and Fort Sumter in Charleston, South Carolina. The water surrounding both fortifications is the context in which these monuments dominate. If any of these monuments lost their respective context, it would greatly decrease their impact. In a cityscape, context makes the vernacular architecture a significant “whole” linked to its living surroundings. On the other hand, a major monument in a cityscape can impose itself upon its surroundings or context.

Values

Evaluation of cultural properties is based on their values, which define their significance. A historic object or structure may contain different types of values. By recognizing the values of cul-

tural properties, we develop and improve our knowledge, enhancing our appreciation for our ancestors, heritage, country, and world. It is the identification of the values that makes an object important, and causes it to stand out as an important part of our cultural heritage.

It is our recognition of values that brings about appreciation of cultural property. A confederate flag from a Civil War battle, the Vietnam Memorial in Washington, DC, and the Statue of Liberty have sentimental and emotional value above all. The Vietnam Memorial does not have as much age value as Fort Sumter or Castillo de San Marcos, but it has tremendous emotional value. The memories and feelings evoked by the Vietnam Memorial, which is also an artistic object, is one of the values that people ascribe to a monument as part of its significance.

Values are not just in the structure, but can also be related to the materials of the structure. The layers of paint that accumulate on a historic building are part of its age value. If removal of these layers takes place it should be carefully documented. Without documentation, we lose the age value of the building, and part of history is lost. Removing the original layers of paint from a historic building without documentation is like tearing pages out of a book of history. If paint is removed, a chronological representation of the removal process should be displayed on part of the wall for public observation, while the rest of the paint documentation should be kept in an archives.

Intervention on behalf of any cultural property should be minimal, and should be based on the values of the property and its elements, especially if the property is a rare example of its type. Before anything is done to a cultural property, we

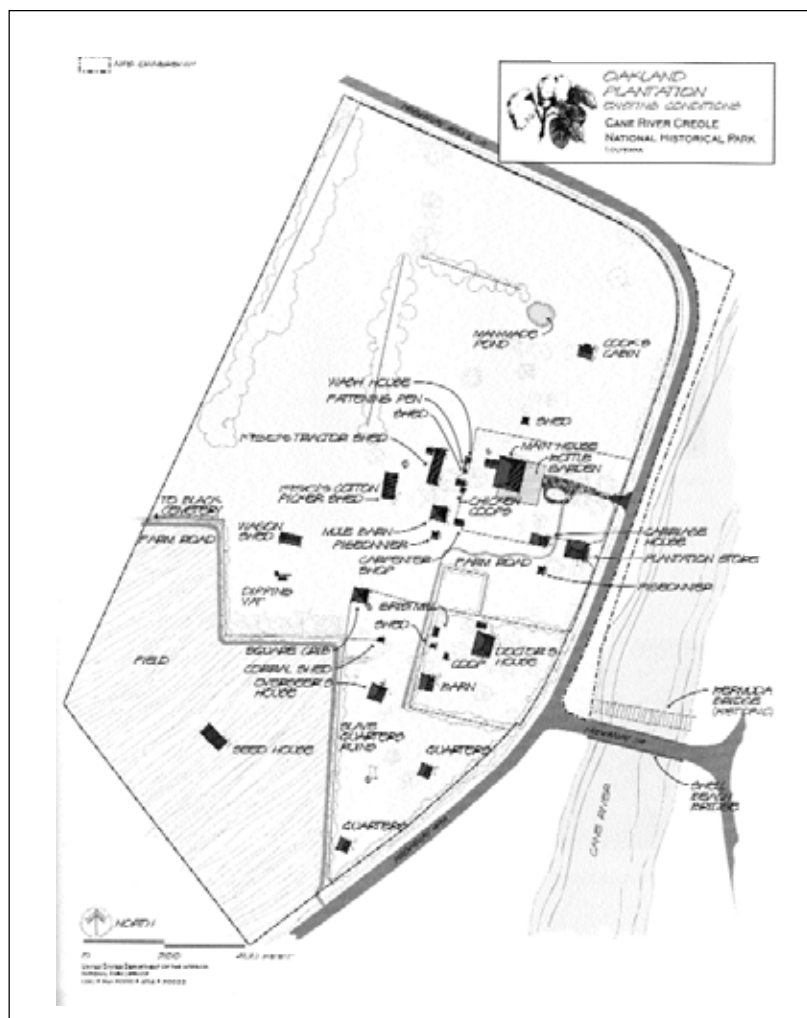
should bear in mind the principles and procedures for the preservation of historic objects and apply the required methods, principles, and techniques (old and new) to the various parts of the whole object.

According to the condition and value of each element of historic structures there are different procedures and levels of intervention that we should consider. These should be based on maintenance, stabilization, consolidation, preservation, restoration, reproduction, reconstruction, and re-evaluation.

All of the levels of intervention and procedures should be considered at the beginning of the evaluation and condition assessment of a cultural property. In this way, we have the best chance of preventing unnecessary damage to the cultural property.

Preservation or restoration of cultural property should respect the existing condition of the monument. Preservation or restoration should

This site plan is of Oakland plantation. This plantation is located alongside the Cane River in Louisiana. The majority of the structures in this plantation were constructed in the first half of the 19th century. Map courtesy Southeast Regional Office, National Park Service.



take place on a case-by-case basis, and should be based on information regarding the history of the structure, evaluation of the structure, and the sensitivity and technical competence of the conservator. The practical skills of a trained craftsman are one of the most important tools that can be used in preservation and restoration.

In historic preservation or restoration, all new parts, additions, or new treatments to an original historic wall, door, window, floor or ceiling, should be clearly identified. The original part will show the craftsmanship of its own time, besides the age and other values, and comparing it with the new repaired or patched area makes the old part more significant.

By identifying the changes in the historic structure or site, we will add to its value and the public will have a better understanding of the structure. Identifying old material adjacent to new material in a treated or restored area is analogous to observing an old person standing next to a child. The child is beautiful and fresh, but the old person, with wrinkles can give us the experience of age, and talk about the tradition and culture of his country and civilization. Beautiful young people are accidents of nature, but beautiful old people are works of art.

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The year 2000 marked the 25th anniversary of the Preservation Briefs series. First published in 1975, the series now includes 40 titles. Prepared by the Technical Preservation Services program of the National Park Service, Preservation Briefs have helped homeowners, preservation professionals, organizations, and government agencies by publishing easy-to-read guidance on preserving, rehabilitating, and restoring historic buildings. Preservation Briefs are available for purchase on the web site <www2.cr.nps.gov/tps/tpscat.htm>. Text only versions are available at <www2.cr.nps.gov/tps/briefs/presbhom.htm>. Illustration courtesy the National Park Service.

